

Salmonid Team

Meeting of May 10, 2006 – Meeting Notes

Item 1. Team Members

Team Members in attendance included: Keenan Foster, Bob Coey, Amy Bolten, Joe Dillon, Charlette Epifanio, Al Nelson, Bill Cox, John Perry, Pete Dayton, Dick Butler, Bill Hearn, Mike Bierman, Jake Mackenzie, Kara Heckert, Daniel Mountjoy, Bob Anderson, Marc Kelley, and Carolyn Wasem. Julie Gantenbein participated, via phone.

Item 2. Discussion re: Biologist

The Memorandum of Agreement between the SCWA and NOAA calls for hiring two biologists, one to assist with the Section 7 consultation for the SCWA and ACOE water operations (i.e., operations of Lake Mendocino and Warm Springs Dams and a variety of channel maintenance activities by SCWA; the other biologists will assist us with the conservation planning for Alexander Valley and Dry Creek Valley.

The ultimate goals for the biologist hired for conservation and habitat restoration include:

- 1) Conservation measures to protect the listed fish
- 2) Means to limit liability for landowners and agencies participating in process

Item 3. Actions

The actions to be reviewed by biologist, specific to this effort, conservation and habitat restoration, will include:

- 1) Review of streams listed as critical habitat, and of those, identify streams for conservation and enhancement.
- 2) Determine what is broken – i.e. culvert removal/repair, bank stabilization and or riparian planting.
- 3) Assist in determining industry specific best management practices.
- 4) Examine existing data and understand needs of the streams and determine conservation plans for those streams.
- 5) Determine what can be done to protect and restore the streams most crucial to the listed fish.

Item 4: Projects for FRGP Grant and Federal funds

Fish & Game provided a list of projects that are good for fish and require the cooperation of private landowners. Some of the Creeks for major focus include:

- 1) Dry Creek
- 2) Crane Creek
- 3) Wine Creek

- 4) Redwood Creek
- 5) Indian Creek

Discussion around the team's ability to concentrate on one area and also what projects would be most likely to receive funding ensued.

Fish & Game indicated that barrier removals that restore anadromy to entire system, combined with demonstration projects that includes work with farmers and landowners were of high priority. However, Fish & Game noted that resources to support these efforts at the state level were limited and that the grant process was very competitive.

Looking for funding at the federal level would be beneficial. Marc Kelley and Carolyn Wasem will explore what types of cost sharing funds are available and any re-programmed funds that become available.

Item 5: Steps in prioritizing projects for funding

It is important to find funding in the very near future for a couple of projects to demonstrate conservation activity is occurring. Further, NOAA and F & G need to have the personnel available to identify long-term conservation actions and projects. The team could possibly use past projects to demonstrate what should occur in the future. NRCS indicated that they have several projects ongoing some, of which involve bank restoration. There is heightened interest from private landowners in pursuing bank restoration projects after this wet winter. (One project to be implemented this summer is 1500-ft stabilization project on Russian River by Stuhlmuller Vineyards. Beringer did a project at Asti.)

The team needs to look at the projects currently underway and determine where they fit into the priorities for additional funding.

In terms of making an immediate impact, NOAA suggested that the team look at funding projects that would reduce sedimentation in the tributaries and the main stem of the river. Dirt roads in the vineyards and on agricultural lands impact critical habitat streams. A potential solution is to shale some of these roads. Not only is this practice something that needs to be explored for funding purposes, but could also be included in the best management practices specific to agriculture and viticulture. (There are several vineyards that seed and cover vineyard roads with straw prior to winter. If steep, straw wattles are often included. These are roads that are not required for winter traffic. Still roads are an important source of sediment and need further attention.)

Another focus from the perspective of some of the private property owners along the river is the removal of arrundo and bank enhancement projects.

Item 6: Water Advisory Committee (WAC) and municipalities role in process

A member of the WAC asked what role the local jurisdictions and the WAC had to play in the process. Of concern to the team as well as the jurisdictions is that unless conservation occurs, the SCWA is not excited about permitting additional water use

requests. The team agreed that we cannot solve future water needs without solving fish needs.

The Water Agency wants to increase the amount of water supplied from 75,000 acre-feet to 101,000 acre-feet. This poses potential challenges. NOAA indicated that increasing the flows in Dry Creek could be detrimental to fish.

In terms of agriculture, there needs to be additional discussions about reclaimed water uses.

Item 7: Regulatory certainty for property owners

For area-wide project proponents that provide conservation as well as subscribe to prescribed best management practices NOAA indicated that there are three levels of regulatory certainty:

- 1) Delisting of critical habitat
- 2) HCP – Section 10 of the ESA
- 3) Fish Friendly Farming Conservation Plan

It was stated that there was not much of an appetite for an HCP. The community still has reservations about the HCP process given its failure when the community at large attempted to address the listed plants 15 years ago.

NOAA suggested that for those property owners that participate in conservation and subscribe to best management practices a letter from NOAA indicating their efforts to minimize take could be given. The benefit offered from receipt of such a letter is unclear. More discussion needs to occur around means of issuing an incidental take statement or incidental take permit.

Some of the private property owners are concerned that without the ability to secure a take authorization, especially when they are faced with an emergency they are unable to perform any work along or in the river and tributaries.

Item 8: Submittal of Grant

With the assistance of the Russian River Property Owners and the Sonoma County Water Agency, the team will submit a FRGP grant proposal by the 19th of May.

Item 9: Absence of the Riverkeeper

It was noted that the Riverkeeper was no longer at the table. Marc Kelley and Carolyn Wasem indicated that he had a meeting with representatives from that group, and they indicated that unless the team supported “no gravel extraction from the river” they would not participate.

Item 9: Next Steps

Next Meeting: June 2, 2006 at 10:00 am

Items for discussion include:

- 1) Gravel extraction presentation
- 2) Presentation of MOA to be signed by Sonoma County Board Chairman Paul Kelley and Regional Administrator Rod McInnis.
- 3) Position description of employee to be hired as part of the MOA
- 4) Discussion of possible regulatory certainty options

There will likely be additional items, but these are currently on the agenda.